

TREASURE OF THE SAN ANDREAS

By Ted Smith

*An estimated 20 billion
in gold has been
discovered in
underground caverns in
New Mexico.*

*According to a television
program (Great
Mysteries of the World)
shown in Australia two
years ago, the incredibly
rich discovery was made
in 1949 by a man named
Doc Noss.*

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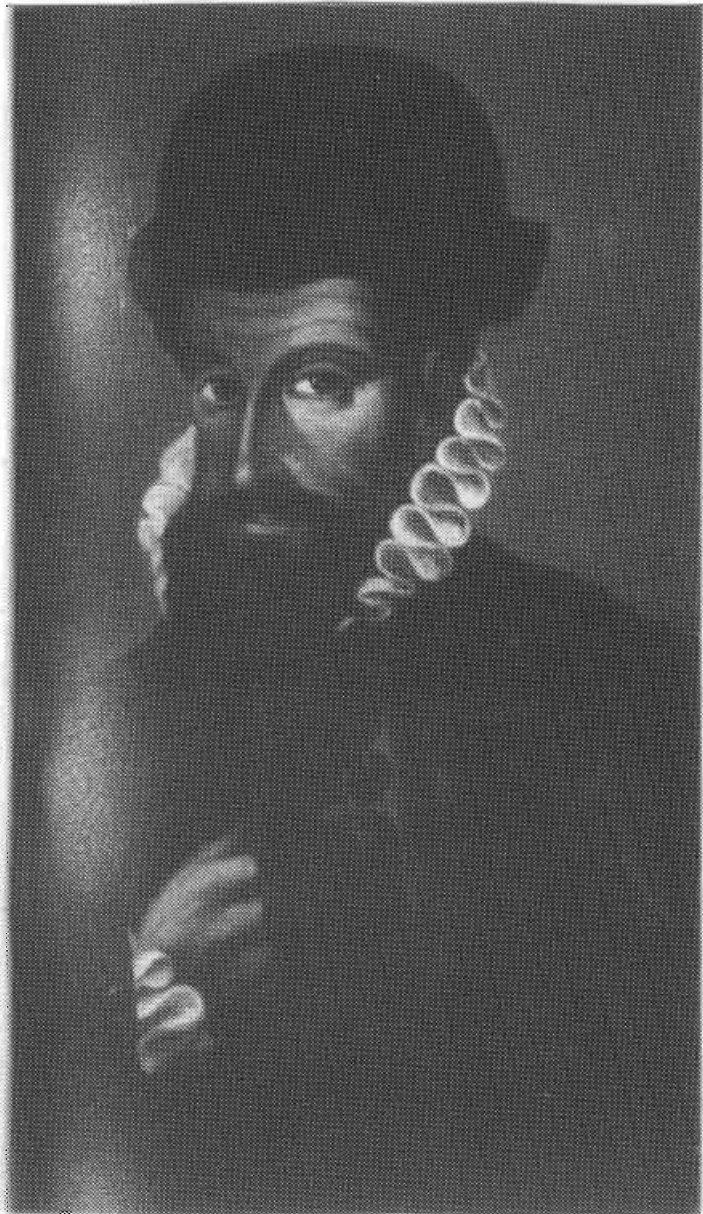
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Doc Noss drove his utility truck rather fast to the east, leaving the main highway going south to El Paso by a rough track which took him across the wild and desolate area that stretched around for many miles. On that morning, he had risen early to go hunting. He was a peculiar man, who preferred the solitude of open spaces to the companionship of neighbourly society. He always enjoyed driving across this parched, lifeless land, where nothing grew but the tall spiky cactus, and he was never more happy than when he was climbing the high ground of the sierras, away from the humdrum lifestyle of the city. He was an experienced hunter and prospector, and although no longer young, he still had all the energy and enterprise of most men half his age. Few people knew this country better than he. For many years he had wandered the high semi arid plateaus of the upper Rio Grande, and explored the numerous mountains and narrow valleys of that remote district. He continued to drive fast along the dusty track which served as a road until he came to the southern end of the San Andreas Mountains. Here he stopped, in the shade of a projecting cliff, got out of his vehicle with a rifle and water bottle, and started to climb up the rough, sloping ground, in the shadow of Vitorio Peak.

By mid-day, after several hours of unavailing search for game, during which time he did not spot even a rabbit, Doc Noss was feeling uncomfortably hot and somewhat fatigued. On the mountainside, where he stood, below Vitorio Peak, he saw an old Indian trail leading up to a great tangle of standing boulders. Up there among the rocks, he decided, would be a good place of refuge from the glare of the sun. He was sitting on a rock, smoking a cigarette, idly contemplating his surroundings, when a stone slab, on the ground a few feet away, suddenly caught his attention. There was something odd and strangely out of place about it. With his curiosity aroused, he went over to the stone, and casually began to kick up the ground around it with the toe of his boot. On impulse, he bent and grasped the stone with both hands and lifted. As it came away from the ground, a gust of air rushed up and swept his face. He stared in disbelief at the hole he had uncovered. It was about ten feet deep, with a ladder that led down to an opening in the side of the mountain. He lay the stone aside, and stood there staring down at the hole a while so amazed was he to find it.

Doc Noss hurried back to his utility truck, and within half an hour returned with a torch. Carefully descending the ladder, he found the opening was the entrance to a long passageway which appeared to go right in under Vitorio Peak. The passageway was about five feet high by four feet wide with a roof that was unsupported against subsidence. Inside the passageway, the bright beam of light from his torch revealed several places where the roof has partially fallen in, depositing small heaps of rubble in his path. He crept unsteadily forward,

with his head bent low. About 100 paces further in, he estimated he was now directly under the mountain. And it was here, in the deep blackness of the inner passageway, that he stumbled upon some sea chests piled alongside the passage wall. The lid of one of the sea chests was partly open, and he lifted it to reveal the contents gleaming and sparkling in the torchlight. He opened the lids of the other sea chests and found that they were all crammed full of gold coins and precious jewels. Reluctantly leaving his incredible find, he came to a room, and beheld, beneath a large wooden cross looming black and sharp through the torchlight, two stacks of pig iron ingots, about six feet high, by eight feet long, by three feet wide. The stacks of pig iron ingots almost filled the room. Upon entering another room, further along the passageway, he stood still for a long moment as though frozen to the spot. There in the full circle of his torch beam was a human skull grinning hideously at him. If he had seen the devil he could not have been more surprised. He lowered the torch a fraction, and discovered the skull belonged to a skeleton propped up against the far wall facing him. He turned the torch this way



Francisco Pizarro

and that, and the light of it penetrated the darkness, unveiling many more mortal remains strewn about the room. He stood there for a length of time and counted no less than ninety skeletons. Doc Noss was not the kind of person to imagine malevolent presences haunting the gloomy depths of the mountain, indeed he would have loudly derided the idea, but all the same for that, he was very much relieved to depart from the depressing influence of that doleful room. Outside in the passageway, he stooped over an open sea chest to select some choice items, which included a gem encrusted diadem, to take away with him. Naturally, after this, he left the mountain, making sure to replace the stone slab so that not a trace of the hole was visible.

When, later, Doc Noss when back to the mountain, his wife went with him. She waited near the hole while he went in under the mountain for the second time. As he was going down the ladder, she shouted after him.

"An' don't forget to bring back one of them pig iron ingots!" He was gone for almost an hour. When he returned, she was sitting on a rock, facing the hole, anxiously gazing down at the opening to the passageway. He came shambling out, in a small cloud of dust, gasping and spluttering, with an ingot cradled in his arms.

"Heaven's sakes!" he cried, throwing the ingot to the ground.

She smiled down at him.

"What's up, Doc?" He scowled up at her. "What the hell do you want that for?" he asked. "Aw, bring it up.

"He looked down at the ingot, laying on the ground, where he had flung it. "But it must weigh over fifty pounds," he protested.

She nodded thoughtfully. "You can manage it, Doc.

"He made a wry face. "Alright," he grumbled, "alright, but I still don't know what you want it for.

"He bent down and picked up the ingot, then carried it up the ladder, struggling, with each uncertain step, to keep from falling with his burden, until his head and shoulders appeared above the hole. "Here," he said, heaving the ingot away from him, so that it fell with a dull thud to the ground close to where she was sitting. "Don't ask me to bring any more of that up, it's too damned heavy!" He remained standing on the ladder, with his hands resting on the edge of the hole, as his wife got to her feet to satisfy her curiosity. She crouched down to examine the ingot, turning it over, looking down at it. He saw her catch her breath, and turn the ingot over again.

"Hey," she exclaimed, "this ain't pig iron, it's gold!"

"Gold?"

"Yeah, she said.

He frowned at her but his eyes were gleaming.

"Here," she gasped, as with an effort she pushed the ingot closer to him, "have a look.

"Craning his head forward, he saw where the rough ground had scratched the dark surface of the ingot. The scratch marks glittered in the sunlight. "Lord almighty," he muttered.

"How many of these did you say was down there?" she asked.

"Hundreds,"

"Hundreds?" She stared at him in disbelief.

"Did you ever know me tell lies?"

"No, you never tell lies."

"Well then," he said, "I'm telling you there's hundreds of them down there, maybe thousands."

A few days afterwards, Doc Noss and his wife drove into Santa Fé and registered a claim giving them the mineral rights

to the mountain.

The private ownership of gold, except in the form of jewelry, was prohibited in the U.S.A. after the American President, Franklin D. Roosevelt, passed legislation to that effect. In all probability Doc Noss knew about the law and believed that the enforcement of it would deprive him of his right to claim the vast quantity of gold he had found under the mountain. But nothing could have been further from the truth. Had he declared "treasure trove" to the appropriate authorities, both the federal and state governments would have taken their share, which would have amounted to no more than what was once known as the "kings fifth", leaving the remainder to himself. His share, of course, would have been calculated according to the current market value of gold at that time, and would have been paid out to him in dollars. Thus he would have become a billionaire. Moreover, he would have removed the risk of losing the treasure and his life

There are two questions which arise out of this story. First, where did the golden treasure come from? Or to whom did it once belong? Second, how did it come to be where it was found? The answers to both questions remain hidden deep under the mountain. But there is not much likelihood that we shall ever know what they are. At the present time, the mountain is surrounded by the security screen of an "Off Limits" military zone called White Sands Missile Range, and entry into the area is strictly prohibited. It took a lot of media interest in 1990 to induce Congress to allow treasure hunters to excavate the mountain. Consequently, we do not yet know what else, besides the gold, has been found by the treasure hunters and, I suspect, we are never likely to know.

What has it all been done for? To me, it is disgraceful. Nothing else seems to matter but the gold. The requirements of knowledge have been discounted and denied. To all intents and purposes, it would seem that the answers to the two questions which arise out of this story must remain buried forever. There is, however, an alternative. There is history. By making some review of history, it is possible to see how the greatest hoard of gold the world has ever known came to be concealed under an obscure mountain peak hundreds of miles from the sea.

Early in January 1531, Francisco Pizarro led his third and last expedition to Peru. On this occasion he was better armed and equipped than ever before, with a force consisting of 3 ships, 180 men and 27 horses for cavalry. With this diminutive army he proposed to conquer a mighty empire, relying on his own abilities and the efforts of his partner, the indefatigable Almagro, who was to stay behind, for the time being, to raise extra forces.

Fray Juan de Vargas, one of several Dominican brothers chosen by the Spanish government to accompany the mission, stood in the pulpit of the cathedral church of Panama, and preached a sermon to the conquistadors. As it was to be a crusade against the heathen, a mass was held, and the sacrament given to every soldier. Having thus most solemnly consecrated the project, the Dominican brothers left the cathedral church, chanting, and swinging smoking censers. They then accompanied Pizarro and his followers, who went on board their ships, which were anchored in the Bay of Panama, and set sail on a course due south.

Huayana Capac, the last of the Incas before the coming of the Spaniards, died at the close of 1525. His last wishes, imparted to the great nobles gathered around his death bed,



were that the ancient kingdom of Quito of what is now Ecuador was to be inherited by his much beloved son, Atahualpa. This prince was the off spring of his favourite concubine. The rest of the Inca empire was to go to Huascar, the son of his lawful wife. Thus was the patrimony of the Inca divided, with Quito in the north, and Peru, of which Cuzco was the capital; in the south.

For the next five years, the arrangement made by their father seemed to work well, with each brother ruling in peace over his own share of the empire. But soon thereafter the two princes were alienated by a series of jealous disputes and both began moving towards civil war.

Pizarro had planned to sail straight for Tumbes in the Gulf of Guayaquil. It was here, on his second expedition, that he had obtained a fair quantity of gold. It was here also that the Greek cavalier, Pedro de Candia, has been put ashore to verify reports that the Temple of Tumbes was practically ablaze with gold and precious jewels. The Greek cavalier had returned and not only confirmed the reports, but outdid them, vividly describing

how he has seen plates of gold and silver hanging like tapestries from the temple walls, and how he had gone into the garden of the adjacent convent, and seen imitations of flowers, fruits, vegetables, trees and bushes, and even blades of grass, all made of pure gold and silver! The Spaniards had been in raptures over the richness of the spoils that would soon belong to them. But Pizarro dared not violate the temple and other sacred buildings, as his men urged him to do, his tiny force being too weak to deal with the multitude of Indians, whose duty it was to guard the valuables. He knew, however, that the golden treasures would stay where they were until there arose a more favourable occasion for seizing them. And now, on his return, with his strength considerably increased, he intended to mount an immediate offensive, and capture those riches. He would send them back to Panama. The sight of so much treasure, he believed, would settle the doubts of the wavering colonists, who preferred to wait and watch events, in the comparative safety and comfort of their homes, while he and his men went forth to blaze a trail, soon they would be competing with each other to serve under his banner.

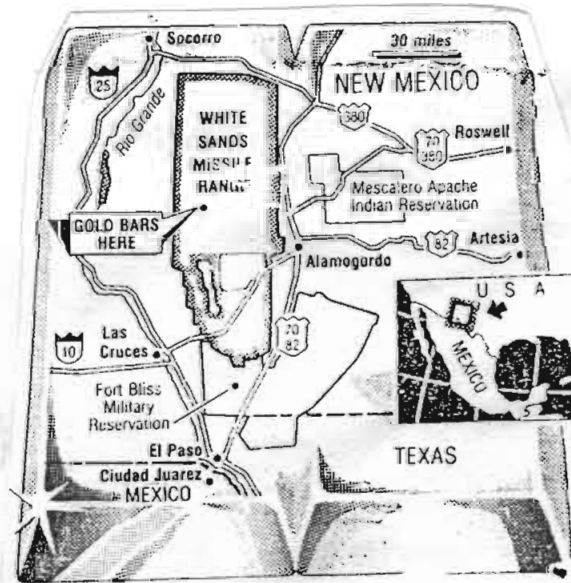
After 13 days of frustrating delay, fighting strong headwinds and adverse currents, he brought his small squadron in to the Bay of St. Matthew, and disembarked his force, having decided to continue south by land, marching along the level region between the Cordilleras and the ocean, while his 3 ships maintained a parallel course, keeping at a handy distance from the shore.

The Spaniards advanced gradually, through perilous jungles of gigantic growth, constantly intersected by streams which the winter rains had turned into wildly rushing rivers. Pizarro, who was fifty five years old, declined a horse for himself, and marched on foot, urging and coaxing his men onward, always ready to give a helping hand where it was needed. It was a dreadful march through thick jungles, snake infested swamps, and barren plains. Day after day, they struggled on. The men sweated and swore, and many rued the hour that they had signed on with Pizarro. But when at length they came to an Indian Village all their troubles were quickly forgotten. All they could think about was gold. As they rushed the village, killing as they went, most of the inhabitants fled in terror to the jungle, leaving behind their foodstuffs and possessions. The fresh food was very welcome to the half starved Spaniards. But even more welcome was the gold and precious gems they found in the abandoned native dwellings. Pizarro himself acquired an emerald the size of pigeon's egg. Many more precious gems as large as the one secured by Pizarro fell into the hands of his loutish followers. In fact there was so many of the precious stones they could not believe they were real. One of the Dominican brothers, Fray Reginaldo de Padraza, encouraged the soldiers to test the gems, to prove that they were genuine, by striking them with a hammer. The true emerald, he assured them, would withstand the blow, whereas the glass copy would be shattered. These ignorant soldiers

smashed to pieces many fine emeralds by hitting them with hammers. It was observed that the good father refrained from testing his own gems in this manner, and the later, he went around picking up the discarded fragments left behind by the soldiers.

Pizarro had all the gold and valuables taken from the village heaped in a pile, and informed his men that hence forth all treasure had to be declared and added to the general stock. In future, any man who violated this law would be instantly put to death. This was a wise procedure in the common interest, as it prevented personal squabbles which inevitably led to wide spread disorder and unruliness. Then, having deducted the "king's fifth", he distributed the shares, giving to each man his due according to his rank. The shares were duly recorded by a notary, and the 3 ships sent back to Panama loaded with the large amount of gold. The valuable cargo represented proof of success, moreover, it represented a very tangible bait. The sight of so much gold would have the desired effect of convincing the colonists to join him.

With that comforting thought in mind, Pizarro boldly led his tiny force further south along the coast. The resumed march brought with it miseries a lot worse than those hitherto experienced. As they advanced, on the road which gave only dangerous footing for man and beast, blinding sand storms assailed them. On the scorching desert the troops clad in metal armour and thick cotton jackets suffered agonies from the heat of the glaring sun. Many fell by the wayside from sunstroke, some never to rise to their feet again. To add to their miseries, a strange epidemic broke out, and spread rapidly through the ranks, killing several of the men. The exhausted cavalcade eventually reached the shore opposite the island of Puna in the Gulf of Guayaquil. Pizarro decided to



set up his command post on the island while he waited out the rainy season, at the end of which time, he hoped reinforcements would have arrived from Panama. The island was near Tumbes, perfectly located for his planned spring offensive. The Puna natives seemed friendly enough, but the Tumbes Indians, who had long been part of his train, were against accepting their hospitality. Pizarro appeared to ignore their warnings, and crossed over to Puna, where he and his men were warmly received. Soon afterwards, he learned that the Puna chiefs were holding a secret meeting to plan an assault on his camp, so he and his men surrounded the meeting place, seized the chieftains, and handed them over to his Tumbes Indians, who instantly butchered them. Maddened by this atrocity, the Punas rose in arms, but were driven off with terrible losses by the Spaniards who calmly stood their ground and met the massed charge of the Indians on their long pikes. Those who were not impaled by the long pikes were cut to pieces by the sharp swords of the Spaniards, or were mowed down by volleys of musketry. Before the confused Indians had time to recover from these murderous volleys, Hernando, the elder brother of Pizarro, led a thundering cavalry charge in

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to their midst, dispersing them far and wide. Hundreds of Indians were slaughtered, and many more wounded. Only 3 or 4 Spaniards were lost in the conflict, but many were injured, among them Hernando Pizarro, whose leg was pierced by a javelin. The Spaniards were triumphant, claiming divine intervention helped them to win a glorious victory over the savages. At the height of the action, many soldiers believed they saw St Michael and his angels in the sky battling with Satan. During the ensuring weeks, the Punas resorted to hit and run tactics, constantly harassing the Spaniards by day and night, keeping them in a never ending state of alarm. All this was too much for Pizarro who was glad to leave the island when Hernando de Soto arrived from Panama with 3 ships bringing 100 volunteer colonists besides horses for the cavalry.

The Spaniards landed in force at Tumbes. Their landing went unopposed except for two isolated incidents on the shore. In the first attack, three men ferrying military stores on a raft, were sur-

rounded on the beach, and carried off to the nearby forest and killed. In the second attack, three other men ferrying Pizarro's wardrobe were surrounded on the beach, and they might also have been carried off and killed had their cries for aid not reached the ears of Hernando Pizarro, who spurred his horse at a gallop towards them. The Indians took one frightened look at the ghastly demon bearing down upon them, and fled in haste to the nearby forest.

To their intense disappointment, Pizarro and his followers found Tumbes an empty, desolate town. The golden treasures they had eagerly anticipated to find were gone. Not a trace of gold or single jewel was to be seen anywhere. Pizarro managed to dispel much of the gloom overshadowing his men by glowing tales of gold, of which, on every hand, there was abundant proof. But he knew the only real remedy for disaffection was action, so he decided to leave a small part of his force at Tumbes, while with the remainder he set out to reconnoitre the land. He kept to the flat lowland himself, while Hernando de Soto

with a company of horse scouted the edges of the immense Cordilleras.

Everywhere the Spaniards went there was plenty of evidence to show that the Incas were a civilised race. As far as the eye could see, the arid coastal plain, though little watered by seasonal rains, was a vast garden of fruitfulness and beauty. This amazing fecundity was owed to the mountain streams which flowed for hundreds of miles through a complicated system of sluice-ways and conduits spread over the country around them. The area, neatly divided by flourishing hedgerows, was chequered with contrasting allotments of cultivation. There were green meadows, orchards loaded with rare fruits, fields of yellow grain, and vegetables of every kind known to that part of the world. Flowers glowed with a myriad of colours, scenting the air with sweet smelling aromas. This, indeed, was a paradise created by a diligent and thriving husbandry.



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